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SUBJECT: Congolese Parliament wraps up special session

¶1. Congo's National Assembly and Senate adopted legislation on the 2008 budget and on the status of the political opposition during their December 15-January 15 special sessions. Both laws are now in force after having been reviewed by the Supreme Court and promulgated by President Kabila. Members of opposition parties subsequently approved internal rules to pave the way for election or designation of their official spokesman.

¶2. The two chambers went into special session following the end of the September 15-December 15 fall session to complete work on the 2008 budget. They also called in several ministers and vice ministers, and augmented their agendas to include consideration of the Great Lakes peace and security pact as well as draft legislation on corruption, the political opposition, political party financing, exploitation and production of petroleum in maritime zones of common interest, sustainable management of Lake Tanganyika, restrictions on circulation of foreigners in mining zones, decentralization, a magistrates council and national electoral commission.

¶3. Several parliamentarians from both pro-Kabila and opposition factions told us members were unable to deal with the full agenda because many were heavily involved in the Kivus peace and security conference. Measures not adopted during the special session will be placed on the agenda for the next regular session, scheduled March 15 through June 15. One pro-Kabila member identified key legislation to be considered during that session as decentralization, the national electoral commission and the high council of magistrates.

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